Frederick Miller, M.D.
A Pioneer of Physical Therapy

Advertisements show Dr. Frederick Miller to have been the resident physician at the Wesselhoeft Water Cure at the corner of Church and Elliot streets in Brattleboro, Vermont, by early February 1855 and in April 1856.

The February 1855 advertisements indicate that Dr. Miller's practice included the Swedish movements, the forerunner of modern physical therapy in the United States. This is over a year before the New York City water cure operated by Dr. George H. Taylor famously opened its first Swedish movement cure department. The February 1855 Wesselhoeft advertisement ran in the very small "Water Cure" advertising column in Horace Greeley's *New-York Daily Tribune*, along with an ad for Dr. Taylor's Water Cure. My best guess is that Dr. Taylor, a Williston, Vermont, native, first learned about this form of physiotherapy in large part from the Wesselhoeft advertisement. The timing is pretty much exact, while other sources of this information in those days were a lot less concrete and none of the other sources represented actual contemporary United States practice of the Swedish movements. Though it is not written to the most exacting standards – "Kinesitherapy, or the Swedish system of Medical Gymnastics" – the phrase, "Swedish system," generally gets the idea across. Kinesitherapy and medical gymnastics could mean many different things. Swedish movements are much more precise, involving prescribed exercises for a specific ailment with an expectation of a specific outcome. Pehr Henrik Ling, the "Father of Physical Therapy," systematized the Swedish movements earlier in the century.

This all suggests that Dr. Frederick Miller may have been the originator or forerunner of physical therapy practice in the United States. A fair share of the credit, then, ought to go to Ferdinande Wesselhoeft, the mid-1850s proprietor of the Wesselhoeft Water Cure, and her consulting physician, Dr. Edward Fellerer, for recruiting Dr. Miller and bringing on a brief, shining moment at the Wesselhoeft facility.

April 1856 Wesselhoeft advertising said the institution "still enjoys its former reputation." Frederick Miller, M.D., remained the resident physician. Conrad Wesselhoeft was the establishment's manager and superintendent. If one may judge according to results, Conrad's main talent seems to have been having the last name, Wesselhoeft. Local 1858 news items speak of the failure of the Wesselhoeft Water Cure, evidently referring to events in or around 1857. Sometime in this period, the Lawrence Water Cure across Elliot Street began offering therapeutic exercise "according to Ling's system." Dr. C. R. Blackall was the resident physician. Joseph Davison was the proprietor.

After 1856, news accounts of the Wesselhoeft Water Cure appear to become scarce, until it was sold in early January 1859. Meanwhile, activity shifted sharply to New York, where Dr. George H. Taylor was taking an interest in and learning about Ling's system, while younger brother Dr. Charles F. Taylor was studying the Swedish movement cure in London and Dr. C. Donovan (apparently a PhD, not an medical doctor) was operating a Swedish movement cure department at Dr. Taylor's Water Cure establishment in New York City. Karl A. Georgii, an early disciple of Ling, taught the Swedish system to Dr. Donovan.

The Wesselhoeft institution's resident physician, Dr. Frederick Miller, seems to be the same person as one named in 1853 advertisements in a Louisville, Kentucky, newspaper on extensively illegible pages. What can be made out for certain includes

- Frederick Miller, M.D.
- Homeopathic physician
- State of Pennsylvania

This, sad to say, seems to be all we know at present about Dr. Frederick Miller, the mid-1850s resident physician of the historic and prestigious Wesselhoeft Water Cure in Brattleboro, Vermont.

In the United States, the physical therapy profession did not exist until after the First World War. In the nineteenth century, physical therapeutics of this sort was provided by physicians. Other staff worked under the physician's supervision. Dr. George H. Taylor, the central figure in the United States, came to call certain members of his staff "patient assistants." While we do not possess a lot of details, my understanding, from Dr. Taylor's writings, is that patient assistants did much the same work as what physical therapist assistants (PTA) do today. Dr. Taylor retired in the mid-1880s. His successor, Dr. George H. Patchen, maintained the Movement Cure Institute in New York City and he opened a second Movement Cure facility in the Midwest, each of them continuing to operate into the World War. WWI reconstruction aides did much the same work as Movement Cure Institute patient assistants and reconstruction aides are often seen as forerunners of physical therapists. It seems to me, then, that a pretty direct line may be drawn from the mid-nineteenth century advent of the Swedish movement cure in the United States to the rise of the physical therapy profession in the post-war period.

Notes :

"Advertisements show Dr. Frederick Miller": The word, "cure," in movement cure and water cure means "system of treatment."

"The February 1855 Wesselhoeft advertisement": "Dr. Wesselhoeft's Water Cure" Classified Advertisement, *New-York Daily Tribune*, Saturday, February 10, 1855, page 3 column 3. "If indicated by the disease, patients may, on request, have the Hydropathic treatment combined with Homeopathy and Kinesitherapy, or the Swedish system of Medical Gymnastics." This February 1855 advertising also ran in Washington D.C. and nationally in the *Water Cure Journal*.

"A fair share of the credit": Dr. Edward Fellerer seems to be most remembered for being the resident physician at the Orange Mountain Water Cure in New Jersey.

"Frederick Miller, M.D., remained": *New-York Daily Tribune*, Wednesday, April 2, 1856, page 3 column 6.

Dr. Clarence R. Blackall
Joseph Davison
Dr. C. Donovan (*d.* 1872)
Dr. Edward Fellerer
Karl Augustus Georgii (1808-1881)
Pehr Henrik Ling (1776-1839)
Dr. George Herbert Taylor (1821-1896)
Dr. Charles Fayette Taylor (1829-1899)
Conrad Wesselhoeft (1834-1904)
Ferdinande Wesselhoeft (1801-1891)

Wesselhoeft Water Cure (1845-1871)

WolfRemainsLost At Gmail Dot Com
TribeOfJesse At Yahoo Dot Com (alternative email address)

Alan Lewis
Brattleboro, Vermont
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